

TRINIDAD'S INDIANS IN THE GUIANAS

By Stephen D. Glazier

The Guianas area is a body of land entirely surrounded by water: the Orinoco River to the west and northwest, the Atlantic Ocean on the east and northeast, the Amazon River and its tributaries on the south, and the Casiquiare Canal on the west. It was not uncommon in the seventeenth century to make reference to the 'island of Guiana'; however, it must be remembered that modern Guyana, as a political unit, is much smaller than the 'island' area referred to in the seventeenth century chronicles and that today the area would include Guyana, Surinam, French Guiana, and parts of Venezuela and Brazil.

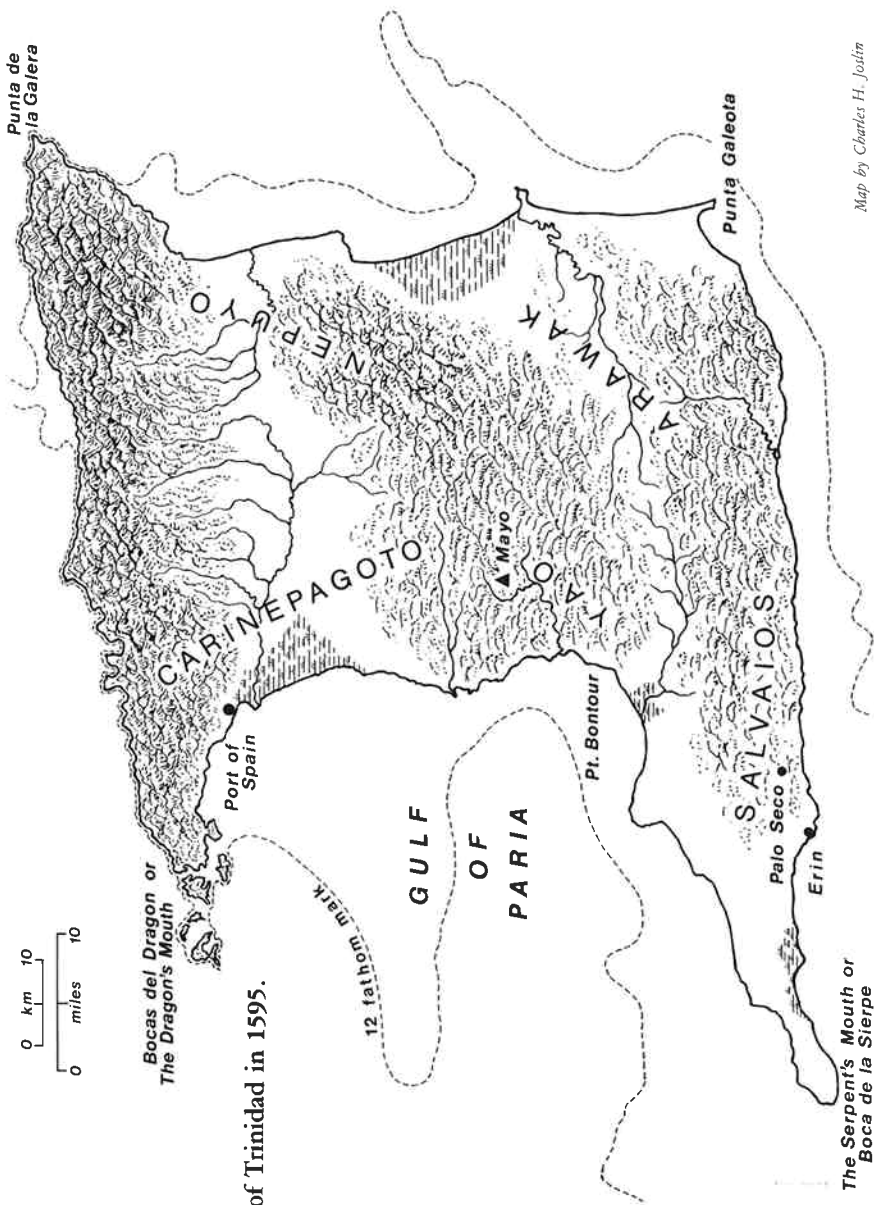
Geographical boundaries, as described above, do not coincide always with the limits of Guiana's culture, for, as Rouse (1953: 15) has suggested, rivers served as a means of communication rather than as a barrier to these peoples; *i.e.*, waterways should not be understood as cultural boundaries. In a recent presentation, Figueredo and Glazier (1978b: 5) suggest that the inland waterways from Margarita Island through the Gulf of Paria to the mouths of the Orinoco were the heart of a trading network. This is given additional support by the ethnohistorical sources (*viz.* Raleigh 1928: 86; Espinosa 1942: 75) and by Steward (1947: 50), who includes Guiana, Trinidad, the Orinoco Delta, and the Middle Amazon as one cultural area united by trade.

Archaeological evidence lends credence to Steward's position. Lovén (1935: 29), in his seminal study, suggests that the Arawak proper migrated from Trinidad to the mainland and the diffusion of pottery styles from Trinidad to the mainland has been documented well (*viz.* Osgood 1942; Bullbrook 1953; Rouse 1947, 1951, 1953). There is some evidence for contact with the Guianas even during the preceramic period. Harris (1976: 34) has identified greenstone from the Guianas in Trinidad.

Raleigh (1928: 12) and Keymis (1811: 183-186) refer to the Arawak as a group located in southeastern Trinidad (see Map) and at scattered points along the Guiana coast. Harcourt (1927) and Major John Scott (1925) also noted the presence of Arawaks in both Trinidad and the Guianas; thus providing a rare instance in which these four chroniclers agree.

Raleigh (1928: 85) claims to have heard the tale of El Dorado first from a Guianese Indian who was living in Trinidad. This Indian also gave a detailed account of his trading expeditions from Trinidad to Margarita and the mainland. The tribes of the Guianas, according to Raleigh's account, seem to have been in a constant state of flux; relatively few were associated with any one location.

The chroniclers do not agree concerning other Trinidadian tribes in the



Aborigines of Trinidad in 1595.

Guianas. Harcourt, for example, differs from Raleigh in that he presupposes a higher level of political organization among the Indians, identifying seven separate 'Provinces' in the Guianas. Schomburgk (in Raleigh 1848: 20) contends that Harcourt's notions of 'Provinces' is more in keeping with European dreams of empire than it is descriptive of native political forms. He notes that the best writers on the Indians of Guiana give not a hint of permanently bounded territorial organization (*cf.* Gillin 1948: 799-860).

The list of tribes given by Harcourt does not correspond in many instances with the lists given by other explorers. Many of the twenty-one tribal names appearing in Harcourt do not appear elsewhere in the literature; however, other tribes, such as the Narrok and the Morowaria, are listed in other contexts (*e.g.*, de Laet 1640: 877). If we confine our attention to those tribes actually contacted by Harcourt's party, the number of tribes is narrowed down considerably to: the *Caribs*, the *Arawcios*, the *Yaios*, the *Sappaios*, and the *Paragotos* (Harcourt 1927: 75, 84, 86). All of these tribes, with the possible exception of the *Paragotos*, have definite links with the Indians of Trinidad (*vid.* Borde 1876; Figueredo and Glazier 1978a).

Harcourt (1927: 86) insists that the Caribs were the original inhabitants of the Guianas and that the other tribes mentioned in his account were driven from their homes in Trinidad and along the borders of the Orinoco. The Caribs were said to be in a state of constant warfare with these other tribes and it was for that reason, according to Harcourt (*id.*: 89), that the Caribs desired protection and made an alliance with the Crown.

A complex issue which has not been answered definitively by the archaeological and ethnohistorical record is: exactly how were these tribes driven from Trinidad to the mainland? Raleigh and Harcourt indicate that it may have been a result of warfare, but they are not specific as to the circumstances. There is also considerable evidence that population pressure may have been a factor (Newson 1976). Given sufficient time depth, I believe that both these explanations are plausible.

The chroniclers tend to overestimate the scale and significance of warfare in the area. It has been contended (Glazier 1978: 280) that wars, such as those reported in the literature, could not have been organized campaigns of political and/or territorial expansion and that the great battles described by Castellanos (1850) and Espinosa (1942) are highly exaggerated.

The Indians of Trinidad and the Guianas did not have a state organization. The worldwide ethnographic sample indicates that people at this cultural level usually do not have a strong sense of 'territoriality'; this is demonstrated for the Guianas by Rouse (1953: 68) who contends that Arawak and Carib settlements alternated along the Guiana coast.

This seemingly random distribution may have had an adaptive advantage. By the various groups alternating along the coastline and occupying settlements

on opposite sides of a river, a single tribal group is able to exploit different ecological areas. Lathrap (1973) has pointed out the importance of long-distance trade in a Tropical Forest setting, and Murra (1975), in his archipelago concept, has shown how very different ecological areas could be occupied by the same people, sharing portions of each with other ethnic groups.

A perennial problem in the ethnohistory of the Guianas is that tribes at both the Tropical Forest and Marginal levels of culture (Steward 1947) seem to have co-existed within the same area. This may have been due to a lack of communication between tribes which is explained partially in terms of dense forest cover (Rouse 1953: 99). Given the vast trading networks (Glazier 1978: 279), however, it is not likely that so-called Marginal tribes in the area would be unaware entirely of the techniques of horticulture.

The worldwide ethnographic sample contains many examples of peoples who have the means (and/or the knowledge) to pursue a horticultural subsistence but, for one reason or another, have not chosen to exercise that option (*cf.* Lee and De Vore 1968). Subsistence base may also have served as a 'badge' of ethnic identity in the area.

There is considerable linguistic evidence for communication between Trinidad and the mainland. Similarities between languages in the West Indies and the Guianas were noted by early chroniclers (*e.g.*, Espinosa 1942: 37; Dudley and Captain Wyatt in Warner 1899), and Amerindian word lists are scattered throughout the literature. Taylor (1977), in his ambitious book, attempts to classify languages of the West Indies and the Guianas; however, there is still a need for additional linguistic analysis. A rigorous application of the techniques of glottochronology (Swadesh 1971) may prove useful in future research.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the Indians of Trinidad and the Guianas were in a constant state of flux. There was continual movement back and forth from the mainland; few tribes (if any) became associated strongly with any one location (*vid.* Raleigh 1928: 85). With the possible exception of Harcourt's Paragotos, the chroniclers seem to indicate that virtually all of Trinidad's tribes also had settlements in the Guianas (Borde 1876; Figueredo and Glazier 1978a: 260); of these, the Arawak, the Carib, and the Nepuyo (*cf.* Lovén 1928: 711-713) are the best documented.

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